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METROPOLITAN POST-OFFICES.

NEW YORK.

NEW YORK is not rich in classic piles, or time-honoured edifices, whose walls, had they tongues as well as ears, could tell a tale. All around us is of yesterday. No smouldering ruin recalls the chivalry, the hospitality, the poetic virtues of a past age. No turreted battlement cuts a sharp outline on the bright sky, and seems, in its gloomy solitude, to mourn the fate of those who once trod its halls. No Gothic cathedral has held in its bosom the ecclesiastical thunderbolts of Rome, or opened its massive portals to the pompous cortege of a seignior of the middle ages. Not a moat reminds us of the fierce feuds of other days, or the necessary precaution with which

"Gallant knight and sturdy vassal
Held in glee their Christmas wassail."

Never a gloomy castle, with grinning *meurtrières*, leads our fancy away—away amid the ghosts of knights in armour, and minstrels with harps, and gay damsels in bright apparel—until the whistle of a steam-engine, or the groaning of the wind through the telegraph wires roughly dispels the illusion, and drags us back to the 19th century. But few, very few of the edifices which surround us date from much farther back than ourselves; we may peer long at them before their windows are peopled with poetic shapes, or we can gratify our love for romance by

"Summoning from the shadowy past
The forms that once have been."

Among the few which do possess some claims to the notice of the antiquary, the building used as the New York Post-office is perhaps the most worthy of a biography. As most of our readers are, perhaps, aware, it was not originally intended for the purpose it now fills. It was, in fact, built about the close of the seventeenth century for a church, and was used as such, with some slight interruptions, for nearly one hundred and fifty years. How proud the New Yorkers of those early days must have been of it, may be guessed from the fact that the steeple and much of the wood-work in the interior were imported from Holland. Some four or five generations had knelt within its precincts; when the revolutionary war broke out, and most of the public buildings of New York were appropriated to military purposes. The church in Nassau-street was first converted into a riding-school, where the raw cavalry were trained. After this profanation any change was for the better, and no one complained when the equine inhabitants were expelled, and the building was used as a prison. Many an unfortunate volunteer expiated his love for liberty by a gloomy confinement within its walls; and many a fond girl, with heavy heart and aching feet, spent hours in gazing at the windows in hopes of meeting some familiar glance. The disasters of the war caused it shortly afterwards to be converted into a hospital, to which use it was appropriated until the peace. In 1790, it was repaired by the authorities, and restored to its original purpose. Divine service was once more performed beneath its roof; and the sound of pious hymns was heard where for many a year the echoes had repeated nothing but the groans of the dying, the complaints of the captive, and the neighing of horses. For forty-seven years, a pastor of the Dutch reformed church officiated in the building; but the growth of the city, and the busy character of the neighbourhood, were fatal to its ecclesiastical character. In 1837, the Post-office authorities offered 10,000 dollars a year for a twenty-seven years' lease of the building, and the trustees very wisely concluded to accept it. It was accordingly fitted up with signs and windows, and after nearly half a century of peaceful tranquillity, became once more one of the busiest thoroughfares of the most stirring city in America.

Of its past history, the architecture of the building, and the

plain, unpretending steeple, are memorials, less striking, however, than the grave-yard which surrounds it. The scanty space which encloses the Post-office was once the city burial-ground. Hundreds of corpses lie buried beneath the sod on which you tread as you proceed to mail a letter; opposite every window and every door stand vaults in which the bones of the old merchants of New York lie smouldering. The trustees consented to lease the house of their God for 10,000 dollars; but they could not, would not, assign to the postmaster the soil where grass grows from the graves of their fathers. The public are allowed free ingress and egress on sufferance; and few ever pause to think, as they hurry to the mail-box or the office-window, that they may be treading on the spot where the remains of an ancestor were deposited.

For such reflections the New York atmosphere, in Nassau-street especially, is unfavourable. Business, thrift, gain, speedily drive the memory of the dead out of one's brain. And if an American can be induced to listen patiently to a brief sketch of the vicissitudes which this queer old building has undergone in its day, it will only be on the condition that it is to be followed by some allusion to the feverish activity of which it is now the scene. If he has no past to feed his imagination, he consoles himself with the reflection that he cares for none; the present is his pride, the future his confident hope. His esteem for the Post-office is in exact proportion to the extent of business transacted within its precincts; and in this respect he is proud of the old church in Nassau-street.

The New York Post-office is said to be the largest in the Union. Besides all the business with Europe, its home receipts alone would give it a vast importance. From it radiate all the great mail lines—northward, to Boston, New England, Albany, and Canada—westward, to Buffalo, and the great states of the west—southward, to Philadelphia, Washington, Baltimore, New Orleans, and the southern states—eastward, to Europe. All letters from the interior for Europe rendezvous at New York; and, with the exception of a mail once a fortnight which is carried to Boston by the Cunard steamer, all letters from Europe are landed there, and sorted for their respective destinations. In the port are lying mail-steamer for England, France, Germany, Cuba, and Chagres or Aspinwall; all of these are freighted from the old church. Scores of steamers and railroads to neighbouring cities only wait the arrival of the mail-bag from Nassau-street to start: without anything like the imposing appearance of activity displayed by the London or Paris Post-office, it is very possible that more actual business is done in the little church than in either.

Let us ascend the flight of stairs to the postmaster's room, and, claiming the kind services of Mr. Secretary Jenkins, wander awhile in the world of letters. What alarming piles on every side! And how much of man's happiness—of food for man's passions—for hope, for fear, for regret, for anger, for avarice, for pity, for love—lies in that shapeless heap! This cartload, which is to leave in the Africa on Wednesday, has been gathered from all quarters of the Union; you will hardly find two postmarks alike, and it will test your geographical knowledge if you attempt to follow a few of them in the long journey they are about to undertake. What a motley collection! Not two alike, apparently, in size, colour, shape, or style of superscription. This one, directed in a bold flourishing handwriting on a brown paper envelope, and hastily sealed, is obviously a business letter to a mercantile firm in Manchester; contains a protest perhaps, and will ruin a happy family. All this in half an ounce. The one underneath, which is folded cross-wise from the sides, like a linendraper's parcel, and sealed with a ten-cent piece, bears to an aged couple at Munich the welcome news that their daughter has landed safe in the land of her adoption, and slyly hints that Fritz has been "keeping company" with her on the voyage, and that he would be much the better for a wife. Ah! there is no

mistaking this heavy envelope with deep black edge. To an unmarried lady, too, and in a stiff, cramped lawyer-like hand. Little fancy is required to conjure up the stereotyped phrases of condolence and sympathy, and to picture the disgust with which the recipient (we love to be charitable, and believe her a young girl of most disinterested character) will turn away from the formal allusions to the disposal of "the property of our late respected client." Who has not received such a letter? Here is another German, addressed in a hand which we trust, for the writer's sake, will be more legible at Stuttgart than New York; there is no fear of miscarriage, for the clerks here can read anything, from Sanscrit to Otaheitan; but there are places in the country where one cannot help thinking that the Germans would do well to discard their Gothic alphabet, and borrow ours. Here are characters which we last perused in the dialogues of Lucian, and the Electra of Sophocles; those thetas and phis remind us of weary old days spent long ago under the inhospitable roof of that dame, who by courtesy, is styled our alma mater. Could we see through the paper, the contents would soon dispel the illusion. There can be no mistake about this clumsy, dirty square missive—a sheet of foolscap unquestionably, and addressed somewhat in this fashion:—

Missis Widdy
O Reilly to the Care
of her bruthir Pat in
the Post Offis iv Innis
kill'n immadiate with care.

The writer exhausted his stock of eloquence in recommenda-

NUMBER OF LETTERS WHICH PASSED THROUGH THE NEW YORK POST-OFFICE DURING THE

	Quart. end. 30 Sept., 1851.		Quart. end. 31 Dec., 1851.		Quart. end. 31 Mar., 1852.		Quart. end. 30 June, 1852.	
	Sent.	Received.	Sent.	Received.	Sent.	Received.	Sent.	Received.
By Cunard steamer	246,636	242,885	265,174	133,470	266,108	262,882	188,599	209,778
“ Collins “	98,774	98,863	84,251	76,649	109,743	91,785	125,169	105,852
“ Bremen “	111,111	97,430	101,920	80,824	127,044	82,946	132,102	87,027
“ Packet ships	7,894	20,303	5,776	16,132	7,383	24,224	3,715	25,421
Totals ..	464,415	459,478	457,121	307,075	510,278	461,837	449,585	428,078

We may say, then, that in round numbers 1,800,000 letters were received at the New York Post-office from Europe, and about as many dispatched from thence for Europe during the twelve months ending 30th June, 1852: about three-fourths of which came from or were sent to Great Britain.

The California and Havanna mails are now becoming a very large item in the business of the New York office. During the last six months of 1851, about 270,000 letters passed through the office for Chagres and Havanna, and as many were received from thence. During the first six months of 1852, the number of letters which passed through New York on their way to the same places, amounted to more than 375,000, giving a total of 645,000 letters received, and as many dispatched, as the business of the year.

But the foreign correspondence bears a very small proportion to the domestic correspondence which passes through the Post-office at New York. The total number of letters whose passage was noted by the clerks during the year, is given as 12,347,118 sent, and 9,105,312 received. Of the former, about 9,600,000 were home letters; of the latter, about 6,800,000.

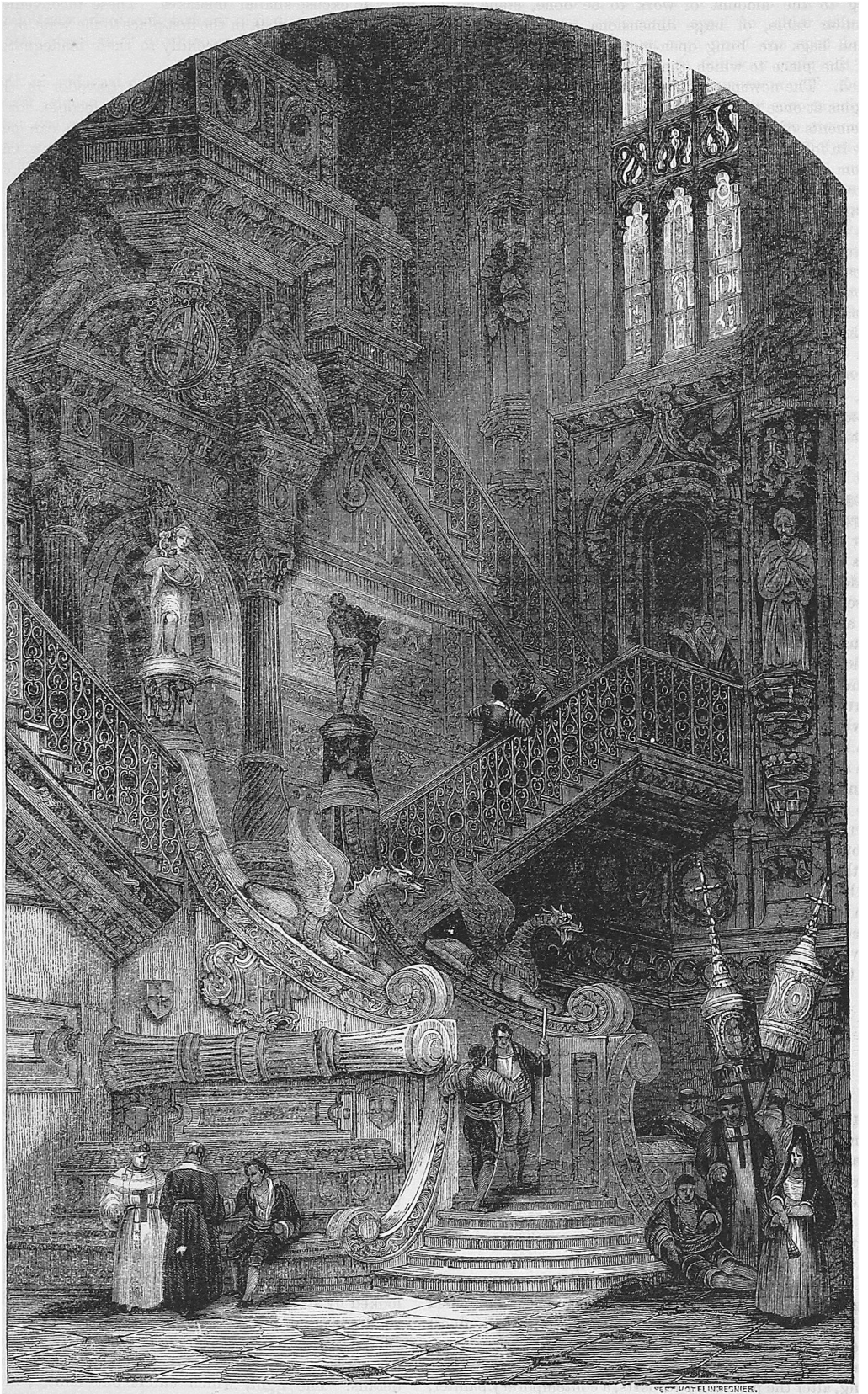
tions to the clerk at the window to send it safely, as the “widdy had been expectin’ of it for many a-day;” and seemed to think that it was not altogether certain that the said official might not surreptitiously purloin it for his private edification. Hosts of others, of every form and hue, we glance at hastily and dismiss without remark. Other people’s affairs are not, after all, so very interesting as Paul Pry would have us believe. But stay; no man under forty could fail to build a tender romance on the neat cream-laid envelope, sealed with *A jamais* in blue wax, and addressed, “Capt. F., H.M. —th Regt., United Service Club, London.” Captain F. is still fresh in your memory, and in that of half the ladies of the fifth avenue and the environs. He stood out in brilliant contrast to the empty snobs who occasionally infest New York in the disguise of British officers, on leave from Quebec or Montreal. The lion of many a drawing-room last winter, a more manly figure, or more intellectual face than his, seldom troubled a maiden’s dreams. It was currently reported that he was engaged to half the reigning belles in succession: but he is gone, alas! and like “Marlbrough,” *jamais ne reviendra*. Who knows what last appeal of a broken heart—what indignant gush of woman’s anger—what phrenzied explosion of jealousy—what tender recital of memory’s sweets—this little scented envelope may not contain!

“In this department, sir, we have twelve clerks constantly employed,” was the ruthless interruption of our reverie by the civil but matter-of-fact secretary. “Fifty thousand letters on an average are sent to Europe from this office every week. Of these, when there is a Collins’ steamer, she generally carries one-fifth less than the Cunard vessel, the mercantile community not having unlimited confidence in the regularity of the American line, and the custom of drawing exchange on Tuesdays and Wednesdays being difficult to uproot.”

But we can arrive at a much more exact estimate of the extent of correspondence going on between Europe and America, by referring to the books of the Post-office. The business done by the Cunard, Collins, and Bremen, and Haver lines, which, with a few packets, carry all the letters between America and Europe, stands as follows for the fiscal year 1852:—

The stamp system is now becoming generally used in the United States. Nearly four-fifths of the paid home letters which are posted at New York are paid by stamps. Of the foreign letters, a very small proportion are prepaid in this manner. And in many parts of the country, there seems to be a sort of reluctance to make use of stamps; hardly three-fourths of the paid home letters which are received at New York are franked by this easy, simple process.

The number of newspapers and periodicals, and other printed matter, sent through the post-office in the United States is very considerable. The charge is now four cents per ounce, and at this rate it is generally cheaper to send pamphlets by post than by any other conveyance. The amount of postage received from this source during the year ending June 30, 1852, was 42,195 dollars. Newspapers are sent free as exchanges to other newspapers, and it is estimated that the daily average received at the New York Post-office is five thousand papers. Owing to the cheapness of the rates charged on printed matter, it is not unusual to see enormous quarto volumes sent by mail. The newspaper tables in the New York office are well worth a visit. One or two clerks,



GRAND STAIRCASE OF BURGOS CATHEDRAL.

according to the amount of work to be done, stand at a semi-circular table, of large dimensions, round which 150 boxes and bags are hung open-mouthed, each bearing the name of the place to which the bag or its contents are to be dispatched. The newspapers shovelled out on the table, the clerk begins at once to throw them into the bags, and though the movements of his hands are so rapid that you have some difficulty in following them, and many of the boxes are several yards from him, he never misses his aim. Long experience has endowed him with such dexterity, that he could take up a newspaper and throw it into the centre of any one of the 150 bags in less time than you would take to read the address.

The number of clerks and carriers employed at the New York Post-office is 160—too few for the business to be done. Forty-four of these are actual carriers, employed in the distribution of letters through the city. Nine clerks and a chief are employed at the distribution boxes, of which the office contains 3,537. Professors of mnemotechny might learn a lesson from these young men, who, after a very short apprenticeship, remember the name of the owner of each of these 3,537 boxes so well that they scarcely ever need to consult the label which contains it. Poor fellows! they are not to be envied. During four days of the week they are “due” at the office at 5 A.M., and are not released till 7 P.M.; and the remaining three days, though comparative holidays to them, would appear days of severe toil to many of us. Nothing can be better managed than the general distribution office. Two windows are appropriated to the purpose; one for letters whose address falls under the letters A to J inclusive, the other for those whose address begins with any letter from K to Z. Within, a clerk stands at each window, in front of a large rack, containing 120 pigeon-holes, and revolving on a pivot, and is thus able, without changing his position or losing time, to select the letter inquired for from one of the 120 boxes. A little further on, another window is specially appropriated to ladies, whom the proverbial gallantry of Americans could not suffer to be jostled in a crowd of men.

There is no dead-letter office at New York. After letters have lain three months in the office, and been duly advertised, they are sent to Washington, there to be opened and returned to the writer, if no clue to the recipient can be obtained.

It is but just to say that complaints are often justly made against the New York Post-office. Letters have been known to find their way to the dead-letter office in a most mysterious way; in some cases, it is asserted, after the anxious recipient has called repeatedly at the distribution office. Delays, too, in the delivery of letters are not unfrequent, and the slightest error in the direction is sufficient, in the eyes of the clerks,

fully to excuse similar mistakes. These inconveniences may probably be ascribed in the first place to the want of a sufficient number of clerks, and secondly to their inadequate remuneration.

The mail is always the slowest traveller in the United States. It is incomprehensible how a people, for whom the swiftest modes of locomotion are too slow, can permit their correspondence to daudle along the road like a lazy pedlar. A traveller starting from Montreal with the mail can always reach New York many hours, and in winter a day or two, in advance of it; and no one seems to know where the delay occurs. The extent to which the telegraph is used by men of business may perhaps explain, in a measure, the indifference with which this mismanagement is tolerated; but it is not the less a grievous inconvenience, which reflects no credit on the authorities.

Nothing is more wanted in New York than local sub-post-offices. When the church in Nassau-street was in the centre of the city, it would have been an easy matter for every one to visit it once a day; but now that three-fourths of the residents live at a great distance from the centre of traffic, it is no slight annoyance to be obliged to travel two or three miles to mail or inquire for a letter. Two or three individuals have endeavoured to turn the deficiency to account by establishing private post-offices on their own responsibility. But they are entirely independent of the control of the postmaster, and hold out no security to letter-writers. The residents of Union-square and the vicinity have learned by experience that it is safer to pay a messenger to carry letters to the Nassau-street office, than to confide them to the tender mercies of the self-dubbed postmaster who has set up an office in the square.

He who would view the New York Post-office to advantage should visit it on St. Valentine's-day. Foreigners have no idea of the veneration with which the custom of sending valentines is preserved in the Empire City. People have been known to give as much as 500 dollars for a single valentine, and the fashionables think they are committing no extravagance in buying several sheets of laced and satin paper with embroidered flowers, gilt mottoes, and silver doves, &c., at from twenty dollars to fifty dollars a-piece. On the 14th, he is a patient man who makes his way to the Post-office window. Crowds of valentines throng the way. Gaudy billets, and boxes of all sorts of shapes, freighted with love-verses, are rapidly transferred from the by-standers to the clerk, and a little higher up, from the official to the eager hands of some expectant damsel, who runs flutteringly home with her prize. A pleasant scene for a dry, hard man of business to contemplate!

BURGOS AND ITS CATHEDRAL.

THOUGH the once populous city of Burgos were to see its remaining population dwindle away to the number whence sprang all the inhabitants of the earth, it would none the less continue to hold its name of city, and would never cease to stop the traveller on his way, for its cathedral is a city in itself, a shrine at which every lover of art will always be ready to offer up his devotions, though it take him miles out of his road to do so.

The Cathedral of Burgos, which, according to some authors, was began in 1221, under Ferdinand III., was not finished before the sixteenth century. It is at present one of the finest monuments of Gothic art in Spain. The two towers of its façade are surmounted by spires most richly sculptured. The engraving, after the picture by Roberts, a contemporary painter, represents the cathedral staircase, the architectural decoration of which is most elaborate. It is by this staircase that the faithful who inhabit the northern part of the city descend into the transept of the cathedral. In order to understand the disposition of the staircase, the reader must bear in mind that Burgos is situated on the declivity of a hill, the summit

of which was formerly crowned by a castle built by Diego Porcelos in 884, under Alphonso III., but which is now in ruins. The inhabitants of the city then lived near the summit of the hill, but they gradually removed further off; and now the highest street of the modern city is the lowest one of the ancient city. The side of the cathedral which is turned towards the bottom of the hill is entirely free from obstruction, and overlooks Burgos; but the northern side is, on the contrary, masked, for the most part, by the hill, and overlooked by streets. The staircase establishes a rapid and easy communication between these streets and the interior of the edifice. This staircase is remarkable for the elegance of its design, and for the richness, splendour, and variety of its details. The light, which enters but faintly, increases the general effect, by imparting an air of mystery to the intricate workmanship of the decorations; the ray of light ingeniously thrown into the picture by the artist comes from a window which is not seen in the engraving. It was in 1832 that Mr. Roberts made at Burgos the sketch of his picture, which is now at the Vernon Gallery in London.